children & families

youth policy framework

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Ministry for Children and Families

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Ministry for Children and Families
Youth Policy Framework

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Introduction to Ministry for Children and Families Youth Policy Framework

What is a Policy Framework?

A policy framework is a document that provides a rationale and philosophy to guide policy and program development for a given target population. It can be a visionary document written for a broad sector, as is the case for the Youth Policy Framework, or it can be the result of a comparative review of several similar programs in order to rationalize, consolidate or integrate them. A policy framework must be consistent with Ministry priorities, goals and objectives and must be in keeping with governing legislation. It includes a vision and principles and is generally written for a broad audience.

What is a Policy Framework Used For?

A policy framework is used to develop and communicate a common understanding of the needs of, and approaches to specific target populations. It provides direction, consistency and accountability.

Why Have a Youth Policy Framework?

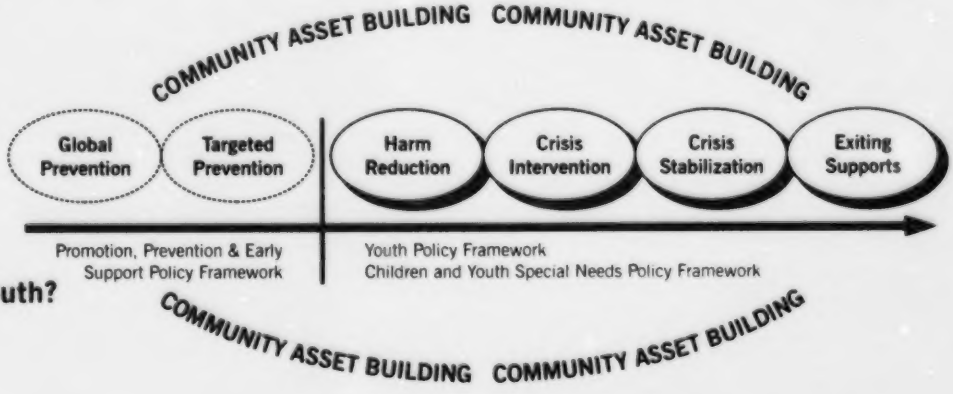
The *Youth Policy Framework* addresses urgent issues for youth in the province while pointing out the need for the development of high-quality system of promotion, prevention, early support and intervention for youth.

It outlines MCF's approach to youth services and defines whom we serve; guides policy and program development; supports reviewing and realigning youth services and developing and implementing MCF's Priority Plans related to Youth Services. While recognizing validity of regional differences, the need for consistency in policy and program development is emphasized.

What Are the Ministry's Goals Related to Youth Services?

- protecting children and youth from abuse, neglect and harm
- promoting the healthy development and functioning of children, youth, adults and families
- ensuring public safety

How does the Youth Policy Framework fit into the Continuum of Services for Youth?



What Are the Expected Outcomes?

The Ministry, in partnership with youth, families, community, service providers, and other government ministries, will support prevention and promotion initiatives that recognise multicultural strengths of family and community, and strive to improve the health and well-being of youth, families, and communities in terms of the following outcomes:

- meeting youth's basic needs for nutrition, shelter, clothing, education, recreation, and caring relationships with appropriate adults;
- reduced severity of problematic behaviour by youth, including substance misuse, interpersonal/property/other violence and other criminal activities, and self-harming behaviours such as attempting suicide and being involved in the sex trade;
- improved physical health (e.g., nutrition, safe sex practices, dealing with injuries and disease);
- meeting the developmental challenges of adolescence;
- experiencing successful transition to adulthood, while achieving positive youth roles at school, work, community, and with family; and,
- increased self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

The Ministry works towards achieving these outcomes for the people it serves through services and programs that:

- build community assets, specifically that build the commitment and capacity of residents, families, neighbourhoods, schools, youth-serving organisations, and businesses, to take positive meaningful action to support the successful growth and development of youth;
- address the needs of youth within the context of environmental influences;
- support family and social connections; and
- assist youth to develop a sense of control over their lives.

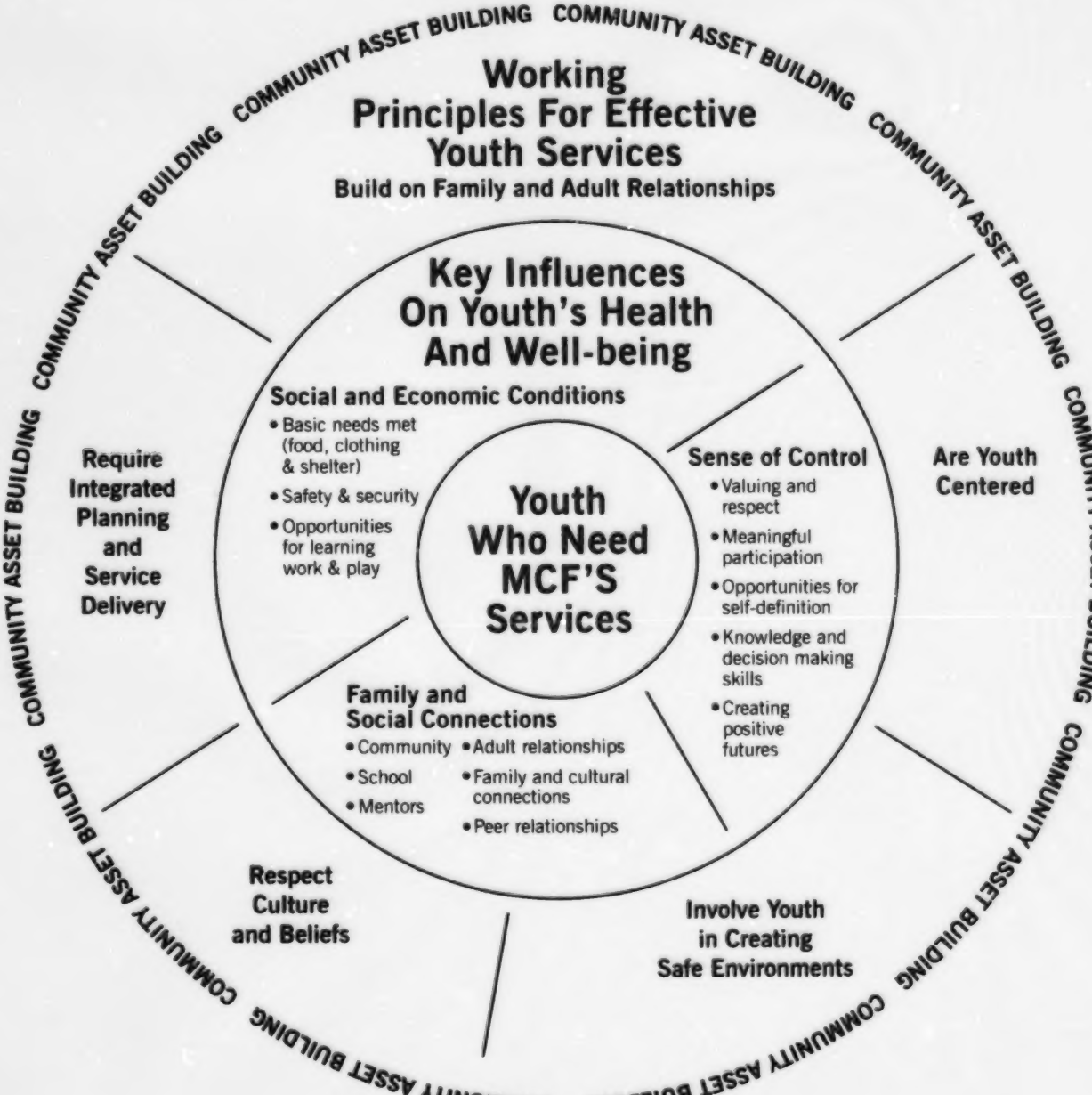
What is the Basis of this Framework?

The *Youth Policy Framework* is based on extensive research into key influences regarding the health and well-being of youth. The framework has been structured according to the following components:

1. Youth Who Need MCF's Services;
2. Key Influences on Youth's Health and Wellbeing; and,
3. Working Principles for Effective Youth Services

Youth Policy Framework Schematic

What Makes a Difference to the Health and Well-Being of Youth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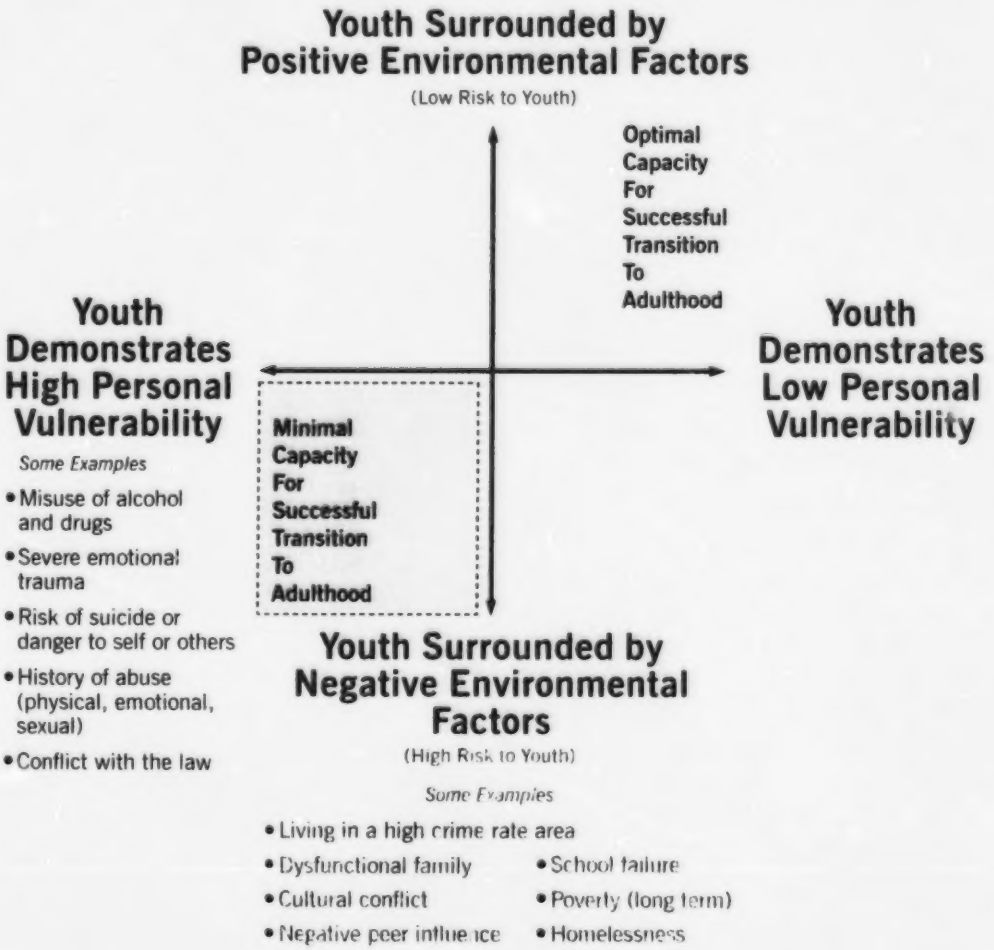
Working Principles For Effective Youth Services
Build on Family and Adult Relationships
Key Influences On Youth's Health And Well-being
Social and Economic Conditions
• Basic needs met (food, clothing & shelter)
• Safety & security
• Opportunities for learning work & play
Sense of Control
• Valuing and respect
• Meaningful participation
• Opportunities for self-definition
• Knowledge and decision making skills
• Creating positive futures
Family and Social Connections
• Community
• School
• Mentors
• Adult relationships
• Family and cultural connections
• Peer relationships
Youth Who Need MCF'S Services
Require Integrated Planning and Service Delivery
Are Youth Centered
Respect Culture and Beliefs
Involve Youth in Creating Safe Environments

1. Youth Who Need MCF's Services

For the purposes of the Youth Policy Framework, the priority target population is youth with minimal capacity for successful transition to adulthood. These youth experience violence, misuse of alcohol and drugs, risk of suicide or danger to themselves or others, living in relative or absolute homelessness, disconnected from family and/or or other significant adults in their lives, family instability, and failure to remain in school, work, or day programs. The history of these youth may include child abuse, severe emotional trauma (i.e. violence/physical abuse, sexual abuse or emotional or physical neglect), sexual exploitation, serious behavioral, mental, emotional and/or physical health issues.

In determining when a youth is at high risk, it is important to consider the combined effect of environmental factors and youth vulnerability. The following diagram illustrates this relationship:


Youth Surrounded by Positive Environmental Factors
(Low Risk to Youth)
Optimal Capacity For Successful Transition To Adulthood
Youth Demonstrates High Personal Vulnerability
Some Examples
• Misuse of alcohol and drugs
• Severe emotional trauma
• Risk of suicide or danger to self or others
• History of abuse (physical, emotional, sexual)
• Conflict with the law
Youth Demonstrates Low Personal Vulnerability
Minimal Capacity For Successful Transition To Adulthood
Youth Surrounded by Negative Environmental Factors
(High Risk to Youth)
Some Examples
• Living in a high crime rate area
• Dysfunctional family
• Cultural conflict
• Negative peer influence
• School failure
• Poverty (long term)
• Homelessness

Boxed area represents MCF's priority target population for direct youth service provision. The remaining quadrants represent target population requiring youth and family support, as well as prevention and promotion initiatives to reduce the incidence of risk behaviors in the total population.

2. Key Influences on Youth's Health & Well-being

Four key influences on the health and well-being of youth will be considered when planning services:

1. Social and economic environment in which youth live, learn, play, and work;
2. Family and social connections;
3. Youth with a sense of control over decisions that affect their lives; and,
4. Community asset building.

Key Influences and MCF's Role

Social and economic conditions in which youth live, play, and work

- basic needs met (housing, food, clothing)
- safety and security
- opportunities for learning, work and play

MCF's Youth Services will:

- provide responsive short-term, immediate basic needs for shelter, food, clothing and safety
- improve access to safe and affordable housing
- increase the connection of youth with adequate health care, including mental health and addictions services
- support vocational and employment opportunities for youth
- support recreational opportunities for youth
- develop solutions with youth and their families that take their social and economic conditions into consideration
- integrate the underlying factors that determine the wellbeing of youth into current decision-making processes
- develop new and different partnerships to create more proactive, comprehensive solutions

Community Asset Building

Family and social connections

- family & cultural connections
- friends
- peer relationships
- adult relationships
- mentors
- school
- community

MCF's Youth Services will:

- create policies and programs that support youth to reconnect with families whenever possible
- ensure services are culturally appropriate and accessible to multicultural and aboriginal youth
- support youth to a positive transition through adolescence to school, family, work and adulthood
- provide communication and relationship skill development/ support networks for youth and families
- increase opportunities for supportive relationships for youth with family, peers, and other significant adults
- support "social networking" strategies for youth
- improve linkages of youth with people in the community
- develop partnerships with community agencies that serve youth

Community Asset Building

Youth with a sense of control over their lives

- value and respect
- information, knowledge and decision-making skills
- meaningful participation
- opportunities for self-definition
- creating positive futures

MCF's Youth Services will:

- demonstrate a respectful attitude towards the youth and their life circumstances
- ensure youth are fully informed of their rights and service options
- ensure youth assessment is interactive and maximizes the participation of youth in documenting their own life, directions, planning and decision making
- promote strategies for involving individual youth in the identification and planning of needed supports and services
- ensure that individual youth who use services provided by MCF participate in decisions made about them
- enhance skills of youth in each region to participate in regional planning and program development

Community Asset Building

Key Influences Defined

1. Social and Economic Conditions

Income, education, employment, housing, safety and security shape the lives of youths and families. Young people must have an adequate standard of living to meet their basic needs. They must have the opportunity to reach their full potential and to have real choices in their lives, because having opportunities and choices is basic to feeling in control. Feeling in control is basic to better well-being. A higher socioeconomic status is also related to feeling valued and supported. Research shows that people who are living in conditions of lower economic status, particularly those living in poverty, are more likely to:

- experience disease, disability and early death;
- experience abuse and/or victimization by criminal activity;
- experience less social support and have fewer social networks;
- have low self-esteem, be unhappy, and experience anxiety, depression, self-blame, and powerlessness; and,
- engage in damaging behavior such as substance misuse and/or criminal activity.

There is an increased disadvantage faced by youth living in rural or remote areas of the province. Youth who require access to specialized services or care providers are likely to be particularly disadvantaged by not having these services and providers at locations easily accessible to them. Geographic isolation creates an additional level of health risk that amplifies the other barriers that youth face.

2. Family and Social Connections

A sense of belonging to a supportive family and circle of friends is the second major foundation for the health and well-being of youth. Caring relationships build on youth's strengths and help them to cope with challenges. The "Kauai" study (Werner, 1989) demonstrated that for high-risk youth, a nurturing family and/or adult mentor who fully believed in them was a key element in their ability to develop a sense of trust and hope for the future and to overcome their disadvantages.

Findings from the Canadian sample of the World Health Organization demonstrated that youth who feel alienated from school due to low achievement levels, and who have poor relationships with their parents, are more likely to engage in risky health behaviors. Furthermore, young people in this group are attracted to others in the same situation, and their risky behaviors become part of belonging to their peer group. For this reason, promoting a positive social environment becomes a crucial part of improving the well-being of youth.

Supportive home, school and community environments reinforce youth's personal confidence and skill development, and give youth an opportunity to make positive decisions and choices. Youth will then have a better chance for healthy development.

3. A Sense of Control and Responsibility

More and more research points to a connection between youth well-being and a sense of control over one's life. Feeling valued and respected, and supported by friends, family, and community and most importantly, having a sense of control over decisions and choices in life is basic to both physical and emotional health in youth.

People who work with youth have identified three key elements that seem to help build capacity of youth and empower them to become healthy, responsible adults. These three key elements are:

1. *valuing and respect:* One of the ways we show that we value and respect youth is by sharing and that they have a right to participate in decisions that affect them. If we are prepared to share power with youth, we can also provide services and programs that recognize their right to participate in all aspects of their lives.

2. *knowledge and decision-making skills:* Knowledge is based on information, experiences, reflections, and feelings. It is a big leap from knowing things to trusting what we know and who we are. If youth are anchored in a strong sense of themselves and trust and act upon what they know, we can expect them to be resilient to negative factors that come at them from external environments.

3. *creating positive futures:* Youth who believe they can consciously create positive futures for themselves have a greater sense of control over their own lives. Adults have an important role to play in helping youth to be clear about what they want out of life and to create positive pictures of their future.

4. Community Asset-Building

Community asset building is defined as an approach that builds the commitment and capacity of residents, families, neighborhoods, schools, youth-serving organizations, and businesses to take positive, meaningful action to support the successful growth and development of youth. It identifies and nurtures the core experiences needed for healthy development of youth. These assets provide a mechanism for mobilizing communities, organizations, and individuals to take action that can make a difference.

The goals of community asset building are:

1. to develop supportive climates in BC communities that respect youth's rights;
2. to meet youth's needs for safe, healthy communities that allow youth to thrive; and,
3. to involve youth actively in the creation of their community's future.

3. Working Principles for Effective Youth Services

Youth services are most effective when the approach is based on research and feedback from youth. MCF's Youth Services working principles are aimed at providing the optimal program approach.

1. Effective Youth Services Are Youth-Centered

Effective youth services are provided in a youth-centered climate that is friendly, respectful of youth's unique needs, and offers opportunities for adult and peer relationships that creates connections and hope.

- Youth are acknowledged as having the capacity to understand much of their environment and are encouraged to take control over their own health and well-being.
- Youth are encouraged and supported to use their strengths and abilities; to direct their future; and, to become responsible, self-managing and self-sufficient.
- Youth are supported to make choices and deal with the consequences of their choices.
- MCF provincial and regional staff and contractors provide the opportunity for youth to participate in program planning, development and evaluation of youth services.
- Youth are treated with empathy, respect, fairness and dignity.
- Youth are supported to demonstrate respect for themself, others, and the world around them.
- Understandable and age-appropriate information about programs, services, legislation, policies and procedures that affect youth is readily available.
- High risk youth, whenever possible, receive interventions in their own environment and community.
- Youth have access to the positive potential of peer counseling and peer supports.
- Youth have prompt access to geographically accessible services with flexible hours that assist them in meeting their needs.

2. Effective Youth Services Build on Family and Adult Relationships

Effective youth services build on lifelong attachments and the important role played by family, extended family and other significant adults during the youth's transition to independence.

- The family, in its diverse forms, is central in the provision of affection, care and support to youth.
- The family is the preferred living environment for youth. When this is not possible, the youth is assisted to develop and maintain attachments to family and extended family.
- Family and youth are supported to develop and maintain a safe and supportive environment.
- Youth and their families are informed of the range of services and options available to them.
- MCF staff and contractors work with the local community to strengthen the capacity of youth and families to provide for themselves.

3. Effective Youth Services Require Integrated Planning & Service Delivery

Integrated planning brings together people with different skills, talents, perspectives, knowledge and experience to improve opportunities for positive outcomes for youth. Each person holds the responsibility for contributing from their own area of expertise both in planning and service provision for the holistic needs of individual youth and planning for community based programs.

- High risk youth are supported by an integrated case management and service delivery approach.
- Youth and their families (where possible) are an integral part of the integrated case management team and are encouraged to take on leadership roles according to their interests and abilities.
- Ongoing service review and evaluation of the case management plan is used to enhance successful outcomes for the youth.
- Communities, families, youth, and service providers are partners in the development of integrated youth services.
- Services for youth are integrated and where possible community based.
- A comprehensive range of youth services and support programs of varying levels of intensity are provided, including specialized services for youth with disabilities, high risk youth, and guardianship services.
- Integrated youth services programs encourage and build the capacity of youth, families and communities.
- Integrated youth services are provided by people who are skilled and motivated to work with youth.
- Integrated youth services have measurable youth-centered outcome objectives.

4. Effective Youth Services Respect Culture and Beliefs

- Youth services build on and preserve kinship and cultural identity recognizing the multicultural strengths of families and communities.
- Aboriginal people are involved in the planning and delivery of services specific to Aboriginal youth.
- Youth services will ensure a youth-centered, integrated approach to serving Aboriginal youth and families that promotes and protects the healthy development of youth while recognizing their lifelong kin and community attachment.
- Youth services are sensitive and responsive to cultural differences and special needs of youth with respect to age, stage of development, gender, ability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, spirituality and lifestyle.
- The cultural experiences of sexually exploited youth, lesbian, gay, transgender and youth with special needs and/or invisible disabilities receive special consideration.

5. Effective Youth Services Involve Youth in Creating Safe Environments

- Youth have the right to be protected from abuse, neglect and harm or threat of harm and services consider youth safety and well-being as paramount considerations.
- Youth services incorporate prevention, health promotion and community development to enhance the likelihood of improved health for youth and their families.
- Youth services ensure high risk youth have access to adequate nutrition, clothing, medical care, housing and the necessary resources and services to ensure their health and safety.

For a complete bibliography on the Youth Policy Framework, please contact the Mental Health & Youth Policy Section, Policy Division, Ministry for Children and Families, (250- 387-9749).